



## Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

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**AGENDA DATE:** September 5, 2007

**TO:** Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

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**SUBJECT:** Approaches to Addressing and Reducing Trail Use Conflicts

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the FCT Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force (Task Force) receive a presentation on alternative approaches to addressing trail use conflict.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The purpose of this staff report is to present alternative approaches to addressing trail use conflict. These approaches have been developed and implemented in other communities for a variety of reasons. While this staff review of alternative approaches is not exhaustive, it is intended to help generate discussion on potential solutions for Santa Barbara. The following discussion provides examples of four approaches, including 1) trail user education/etiquette, 2) odd/even trail use designation, 3) multi-use trails, and 4) designated use and parallel trails. New trails development is not considered since the focus of the Task Force is on the use and management of the existing front country trail system. The Summary section identifies two key questions for consideration.

### **TRAIL USER EDUCATION/ETIQUETTE**

Conflicts between trail users can be minimized with a combination of trail use restrictions and trail user education/etiquette programs where there are multi-use trails. The purpose of trail user education/etiquette programs is to inform user groups of the presence and expectations of other user groups. This has been most important on trails that are used by discrete groups of users, for example, hikers, hikers with dogs, mountain bikers, and equestrians. In addition to informing groups of the presence of "competing" groups, several jurisdictions have promoted written trail etiquette and safety codes as a successful form of community education. The following discussion focuses

on approaches taken in the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District in California and Boulder County, Colorado.

***Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, California***

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) manages more than 50,000 acres of open space that sprawls over two counties south of San Francisco. Many of the District's trails traverse rugged and topographically challenging terrain, making conditions there similar to those in the Santa Barbara foothills region. Since its founding in 1972, the District has focused primarily on developing and managing an extensive system of trails in the region's open space preserves.

The development of the District's trail safety and etiquette policies was stimulated by conflicts between users on some of the District's trails. The trail etiquette policy was the subject of discussion among user groups and the District's managers to avoid more severe restrictions, such as closing some trails to bicyclists or horses.

In addition to trail etiquette and education, the District also restricts some trails from certain users. Restrictions are mostly based on environmental sensitivity of the preserve land, but also in cases where the topography results in narrow or circuitous trails. All preserve trails are open to hikers, and most are also available to equestrians. About half of the trail system is also open to dogs on leashes, and about two-thirds are open to bicyclists. There are 25 preserves within the District. Among the preserves closed to mountain bikes are several of the most environmentally sensitive, including La Honda Creek, Los Trancos, Pulgas Ridge and Picchetti Ranch.

*Sharing the Trails*, a District pamphlet for trail users which is posted at many of the trail heads, outlines a series of recommendations that encourage different user groups to share the trail responsibly. As shown in Attachment A, the brochure includes direction to courtesy, yielding, alertness, speed limits, and remaining on designated trails, among others. Trail safety and etiquette guidelines for the District are provided in Attachment B.

***Boulder County Parks and Open Space  
Boulder, Colorado***

The Boulder Colorado area is noted for its extensive and popular system of trails and open space, and for the relatively high percentages of residents who are hikers and mountain bikers. Boulder County Parks and Open Space manages around 70,000 acres of parks, preserves and trails. In response to reports of conflicts between user groups on many multi-use trails, the County conducted a survey of trail users to document trail conditions, establish baseline data on perceived user conflicts, and to guide trails management.

Using the survey results as a base, County trail managers developed specific regulations governing the use of the various trail systems by different users. These

policies were adopted in consultation with hiking, equestrian, dog owner, and mountain biking groups. The county's strategy was two-fold. First, determine which trails needed to be restricted from particular users (e.g., mountain bikes, horses) due to environmental sensitivity or substandard trail conditions (sight distances, grades, etc.) Second, promulgate specific trail etiquette regulations to minimize trail user conflicts on those trails capable of supporting multiple users. Among the regulations for the trail systems with the highest reported conflicts was a restriction of mountain bike use to two days per week.

Mountain Bikes on Open Spaces, information from the Boulder County Parks website, is provided in Attachment C. Examples of the trail regulations developed by Boulder County Parks and Open Space, which are widely disseminated on the Internet and through flyers at trailheads, can be found at [www.co.boulder.co.us/openspace/](http://www.co.boulder.co.us/openspace/). The Boulder area is also served by other public agencies including the City of Boulder, US Forest Service and the National Park Service. In addition, trails management and outreach is facilitated by an extensive coalition of trail user groups, working as the Boulder Area Trails Coalition. A Statement of Objectives from the Boulder Area Trails Coalition is included as Attachment D.

## **ODD/EVEN DAYS TRAIL USE DESIGNATION**

The designation of odd/even day trail use can reduce trail conflicts by separating trail users, without eliminating a specific use of a trail. Odd/even trail use designation is primarily used to separate hikers and equestrian use from mountain bike use. As the two examples below indicate, it has been implemented with some success. As the Task Force is aware, the Front Country Trails Working Group also proposed a two-year pilot of odd/even trail use designation for Santa Barbara's front country trails.

### ***Mill Creek Canyon, Salt Lake Ranger District, Wasatch-Cache National Forest Salt Lake City, Utah***

Mill Creek Canyon is within a 30-minute drive of more than 500,000 people in the Salt Lake City area. Mill Creek Canyon road is paved and begins at Wasatch Blvd in Salt Lake City. The road winds east, gaining elevation, into the mountains for approximately 10 miles. The road ends at a trailhead. Fifteen different trails are accessed from the road. The road is a county road located in the Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The Salt Lake County Parks Department operates an entrance kiosk at the beginning of the road.

Increasing public use in Mill Creek Canyon by the large local population led to crowded conditions and conflicts, safety concerns, and complaints between hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikes. As a solution to this situation, the Salt Lake Ranger District closed the three trails in the upper Mill Creek Drainage to mountain bikes on odd numbered calendar days. The trails affected are the Big Water Trail (3 miles), Little Water Trail (1.8 miles), and a section of the Great Western Trail (5 miles). The restricted area is only a portion of the trails in Mill Creek Canyon. There are numerous other trails with

unrestricted mountain bike use. The restriction is enforced by a Forest Service Forest Order. Violations carry a penalty of \$50. Funding for law enforcement is generated from entrance fees collected at the canyon entrance kiosk. The entrance fee is \$2.25 per car. Fees are collected by the County and the funds pay the kiosk operation and the bulk of the money is donated to the Forest Service for recreation facility maintenance and law enforcement.

The Forest Service issued the Forest Order for the mountain bike odd/even regulation in 1997 working in conjunction with the Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation Department. Area trail groups were also involved in developing the solution to the trails use issue. Previously, the Mill Creek Canyon Protection and Management Program was created in 1991 to fund improvements in the canyon's ecosystem and its recreational facilities. This group was not part of addressing user conflicts, but the working relationships developed by this program assisted in developing solutions to the trail conflict issues.

The odd/even regulation is reported to be working relatively well. It is clear to the trail users which days the mountain bikes can be on the trails. The trail restriction information is also provided at the kiosk. Adequate Forest Service law enforcement presence is a key factor in the success of the program. Unfortunately law enforcement presence has decreased because of a lack of funding over the years and as a consequence violations have increased. The entry fee of \$2.25 has not been increased since the inception of the program although law enforcement and maintenance costs have increased. As a result hikers play a role in enforcement when mountain bikes are on the trails in violation of the odd/even restrictions.

The situation in Mill Creek Canyon is made more complicated because there is also an odd/even day restriction for dogs off leash. Dogs must be on leashes on even days on all trails. This dog restriction seems to be more contentious than the mountain bike regulation and makes keeping track of who can do what on which day more difficult.

### ***Lake Tahoe Rim Trail, US Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit***

The section of Tahoe Rim Trail presented in this example is located on the eastern side of Lake Tahoe and is in the Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. The 8-mile section of the Tahoe Rim Trail begins at Tahoe Meadows and continues south to Tunnel Creek Road. The Tahoe Rim Trail was built by a cooperative effort between the Forest Service and the nonprofit Tahoe Rim Trail Association. When they started building the trail in 1984, the Association planned for hiker and equestrian use. A map of the 8-mile section of the Tahoe Rim Trail is provided in Attachment E.

The 8-mile section of the Tahoe Rim Trail receives intensive recreational use and experiences conflicts between bikers, hikers, and horse packers on the multi-use trail. User conflicts have been continual since trail inception. The Forest Service, in conjunction with the Tahoe Rim Trail Association, implemented a bicycle ban on the trail in 1989. The Forest Service lifted the ban on bicycles in 1996, but then banned them

again in summer of 1999. The ban was not very successful, since enforcement was limited to signage and the signs were vandalized and stolen.

The alternative of the odd/even day bicycle use schedule was presented during a Tahoe Rim Trail Association meeting. The Forest Service and Tahoe Rim Trail Association agreed to implement the program in 1999. Implementation of the odd/even day bicycle schedule changed the previous bicycle closure to a recommendation that mountain bikers use the trail only on even-numbered days. There are no restrictions on hikers or equestrians. The odd/even day bicycle use is not enforced by regulation, and relies on voluntary compliance. There are other trails in the area of Tahoe Meadows and Tunnel Creek Road which do not have bicycle restrictions and in the Tahoe Basin there are numerous trails that are open for multi-users (hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians) that don't experience the same intense conflict.

The odd/even schedule is viewed by the Forest Service Trail Manager as working very well. The odd/even program has solved many of the trail conflicts. There are occasional violations of the schedule but over-all it has been successful. According to the Tahoe Rim Trails Association website "the decision to alternate user days has been very successful." It is great for hikers who want a more peaceful hike, and it is great for mountain bikers because many hikers avoid the trail on days when mountain bikes are allowed. According to the Tahoe Area Mountain Bike Association the schedule is better than having the trail closed completely to mountain bikers.

## **SHARED MULTI-USE TRAILS**

A trails literature search revealed that many agencies in California are addressing similar trail use conflict issues and evaluating the feasibility of developing multi-use trails that can be shared by avoiding or reducing conflicts through trail design and management. A multi-use trail is defined as one that is used by more than one user group or for more than one trail activity. Agencies and user groups are working toward solutions through teamwork and/or pilot projects.

### ***Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA)***

The SMMNRA covers approximately 150,000 acres and includes federal, state and local parks, in addition to private and other agency-owned or managed property. The SMMNRA has a range of trails for pedestrian and equestrian use only as well as trails that allow for bicycle use that are also multi-use. Through the Santa Monica Mountains Area Recreation Trails Coordination project (SMMART), the National Park Service (NPS), the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, worked together to provide a coordinated agency vision for trails planning and improve trail user experiences. User groups and individuals also participated in SMMART during the mid-1990s to identify trail issues and participate in action teams.

Some of the key objectives of the SMMART included the development of a trails inventory, an assessment of existing trails for multi-use and development of new multi-

use trail guidelines. The purpose of the guidelines is to minimize user conflict and ensure a safe and enjoyable trail experience, with minimal impact to natural resources. Attachment G provides the recommended guidelines for construction of *new* multiple use trails. There was no consensus regarding how the guidelines should be applied to *existing* trails. In an effort to accommodate a variety of trail users, the guidelines include the following:

- Construct wide trailheads and sign to clearly state rules, regulations, degree of trail difficulty, and other important trail use and safety information.
- Where there is a speed differential between trail users apply the following parameters – including turnouts, long sight distances (50-85 ft), limit trail running grade (10-15%), maintain trail width (4-5 ft) and provide vegetation clearance (8 ft wide x 10 ft ht).
- Provide a trail width that is narrower than a fire road in order to provide a similar aesthetic experience as a single track trail.
- Other recommendations included parameters for sideslope, outslope, switchbacks and rolling dip grades.

### ***Miscellaneous California State Parks Examples***

A wide trail base appears to be the overlying theme for state multi-use trail designation. The following two examples illustrate the use of existing roads and new trails that meet state trail standards for multiuse.

McNee Ranch, also called Montara Mountain, is a part of Montara State Beach in San Mateo County. McNee Ranch is comprised almost entirely of wide fire roads designated as multi-use, although two trails are designated hiking only. McNee Ranch has steep tough trails and is a favorite of Bay Area mountain bikers.

The Lake Oroville State Recreation Area (LOSRA) is managed by California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), owned by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and under the overall authority of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) through a DWR-FERC licensing agreement. The DPR opened several trails to cyclists in early 2002, as an opportunity to increase multiple-use trails. Subsequently, the FERC received complaints about bicycle use and reminded the DPR about an existing FERC recreation plan (1994) plan, and said a formal request to amend that plan would be necessary to open the trails. FERC's plan favored specialized separate use trails over multiuse trails. FERC prepared an Environmental Assessment that recommended reversing DPR's multi-use trails. The EA has been challenged by trail user groups and FERC's decisions have been criticized by other agencies.

Currently, hike/bike, hike/horse, hiker only and multi-use trails occur within LOSRA. Some of these trails occur on parallel courses through the park (Attachment H). LOSRA multi-use trails generally conform to DPR design standards for multi-use trails, which are generally wider than specialized trails. Multi-use trails that fall short of guidelines

may be connector trails or due to shortfalls in funding by DWR. The fate of LOSRA multiuse trails and other trails will depend upon FERC licensing renewal, due in 2007. The renewal will include a trails management plan for existing and future trails.

## **PARALLEL OR DESIGNATED USE TRAILS**

Local examples exist of parallel use trails. Parallel trails provide adjacent routes or pathways for distinct trail uses, as well as designated use trails where a trail is specified for a specific use only or where a trail specifically prohibits a certain type of use.

### ***Santa Barbara Coastal Trail***

The coastal trail through the County, in sections also known as and designated the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (De Anza Trail) is a part of state wide trail system that also provides local recreation opportunities. The state coastal trail is designated as a long distance route from the Oregon border to Mexico. The local coastal trail is an amalgam of different routes: single track trails, sandy beach areas, bikeways and road shoulder trails that make the connection through the County entering on the sand and the on road access from the Rincon parkway to the south and working its way northward finally exiting the county on Highway 1 at the City of Guadalupe.

The section of trail along the Gaviota Coast from the west end of the City of Goleta to Gaviota State Park is planned for, and sections are developed as, a parallel use trail to accommodate hikers, equestrians and bicyclists separate from Highway 101. The design standard for this trail is very similar to the Ojai Valley Trail that connects the City of Ventura with the City of Ojai.

The design for these trails incorporates the separation of trail uses based on the inherent different speeds of the use. The basic cross section for the trail would include a dedicated area for bicycle use, typically a paved bikeway, with a separate area for hikers and equestrians that is typically native soil surface or other natural surface. A wide enough area is provided so that adequate separation is maintained between the uses. Typically the two trail areas run parallel within the same corridor, but in some cases due to geographic constraints or other issues, the trails may traverse a section in separate courses and then meet up again to continue onward.

A section of the trail on the Gaviota Coast can be found between El Capitan Ranch Road and Refugio State Park. The concept for this section of the coast envisions a trail linking the urban area to the state parks and proposed beach access ways to the west along this section of coast without having to access them from Highway 101, thereby maintaining a complete separation between the motorway and the coastal trail. The separation of uses is effective in ensuring that the optimal travel way and surface is available to both the bicyclist and the equestrian and hiker.

Though this type of trail design is most conducive to use in relatively flat terrain, it is possible to vary the formula so that parallel routing can be accomplished though not always within the same corridor, yet both encompassing a similar route and destination.

### ***Cachuma Equestrian Trail – North Shore, Cachuma Lake County Park***

The County of Santa Barbara operates the Cachuma Lake Recreation Area under an agreement from the Bureau of Land Management that grants all management of the surrounding lake area and lake recreation to the County. County Parks manages various facilities along the south shore including camping and boating activities. County Parks also manages a large group camping facility at the Live Oak Campground that is also the site for special events. The north shore of the lake remains a primitive area where the County leases grazing rights to the adjacent ranches who are also responsible for a level of land management and stewardship.

A designated use trail exists along the north shore that is exclusively used by equestrians and commences at Live Oak Camp with a loop to Santa Cruz Bay and back (Attachment I). Trail use is controlled by County Parks through a registration program at the main gate, access control for vehicles at Live Oak Camp, and users also pay the Cachuma Recreation Area day use fee for the use. The origination of the equestrian trail may have come into use at the time that the Rancheros Visitadores would use Live Oak Camp for staging of their special events and trail rides and subsequently, the public requested use of this trail.

In recent times, trail use has been restricted by the County for compatibility with the ranching operations with trail use limited to equestrians on horse back within an open cattle range area. Restricted use was also deemed beneficial as a low number of users was seen as key to controlling disturbance and encouraging and establishing the north shore as a nesting area for bald eagles. Trail use is also restricted seasonally as the rain swollen Santa Ynez River does not allow for crossing through the river at high flows. Users must trailer their horses to the staging area at Live Oak Camp for day use only trail rides. The trail is popular with equestrians, particularly for residents of the Santa Ynez Valley.

### **SUMMARY**

As discussed above, there are a number of alternatives to reducing trail use conflict while providing trail opportunities and protecting natural resources. Implementation of any alternative is mostly like to be successful if there is policy support, education through signage and other materials, involvement by user groups, trail opportunities for all user groups, and some level enforcement or voluntary compliance. For the Santa Barbara front country trails, there are key questions. Which alternatives or combination of alternatives could be considered for Santa Barbara Front Country trails? And how would they be implemented?



**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Sharing the Trails, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
- B. Midpeninsula Trails Safety & Etiquette statement
- C. Boulder County "Mountain Bikes on Open Spaces"
- D. Boulder Area Trails Coalition – Statement of Objectives
- E. Tahoe Rim Trail Map
- F. The Backbone Trail System, SMMNRA
- G. SMMART Multiple Use Trail Guideline
- H. Lake Oroville State Recreation Area Trails map
- I. Lake Cachuma Trails map

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